RAILWAY CLEARING-HOUSE.

In a pamphlet lately printed for private circulation, by Mr. K. Morison, a summary of the progress of this useful institution towards general adoption is thus given:—

"On the 2nd of January, 1842, the system of the Railway Clearing-house came into operation on the railways extending from London to Darlington in one direction, and from Manchester to Hull in another. It was adopted at subsequent periods by the companies whose railways extend from Darlington to Carlisle, Sunderland, Hartlepool, and Scarborough; and from Birmingham to Gloucester, Birkenhead, Liverpool, Fleetwood, Lancaster, and Manchester. And in a few months it will be in force in all the railways included in the area defined by a line passing from London, through Gloucester, Liverpool, Fleetwood, and Glasgow, to Edinburgh; and returning by Berwick, Newcastle, Scarborough, Hull, Yarmouth, and Cambridge, to the metropolis; or in other words, on all the narrow gauge railways in Great Britain lying north of the Thames, with the exception of the few short lines which are beyond the limits of the area just described."

From returns for 1845 it appears, that 517,888 passengers were each conveyed clear through an average distance of 146 miles,—the average length of the lines travelled over being forty-one miles; so that each passenger travelled over four railways, on an average, and must have passed three junctions or points of convergence. To accommodate these passengers, 59,765 railway carriages and 5,818 trucks, carrying private carriages, were sent through. There were also sent through, in the same year, 7,573 horse-boxes, 2,607 post-offices, and 180,606 goods waggons, besides waggons conveying minerals, of which no record is kept in the Clearing-house.

RAILWAY TERMINI IN THE METROPOLIS.

The Commissioners appointed to investigate the various projects for establishing railway termini within or in the vicinity of London, have reported against allowing the extension of lines towards the centre of the metropolis. They think that the advantage to be derived from such accommodation has been much exaggerated.

They express a decided opinion, that unless the existing main lines of streets are enlarged and improved, to a degree far beyond the intention, and, perhaps, beyond the means of any of the railway companies or projectors with whom they have had communication, the legislature would not be justified in sanctioning the extension of any railway into the neighbourhood of those streets.

"And here we would observe," they say, "that the enlargements and improvements which would be required are not merely the providing open spaces and areas immediately around the station for the reception of the carriages and other vehicles, which may arrive at or depart from it, but a widening, more or less extended, according to circumstances, of those channels through which traffic must approach the railway, and which, if overcrowded now, must become more so in proportion as the site of the station is found to suit the convenience of the travelling public."

At the conclusion of the report, which is a document of considerable length, the commissioners submit the following recommendations:—

1. That on the north side of the Thames, no railway now before Parliament or projected, be permitted to come within the limits described in our instructions.*

2. That if at any time hereafter, it should be deemed advisable to admit railways within those limits, this should be done in conformity with some uniform plan, carefully laid down under the authority of your Majesty's Government, and sanctioned by the wisdom of Parliament; and that under no circumstances should the thoroughfares of the metropolis, and the property and comfort of its inhabitants, be surrendered to separate schemes, brought forward at different times, and without reference to each other.

3. That on the south of the Thames, either the North Kent Railway be permitted to have its terminus in Union-street, and to join the termini of the South-Western Railway, at Waterloo-bridge; or that the South-Eastern Railway be permitted to extend to Waterloo-bridge; accordingly as one or other of these lines may, upon a comparison of their general merits, receive the sanction of Parliament, and subject, in either case, to the conditions which we have pointed out in this report.

4. That the extension of the South-Western Railway to London-bridge be permitted, subject to the conditions pointed out in this report.

5. That a communication between the railways approaching London on the north and south sides of the river, and a connection between them and the docks being desirable, this should be effected by a railway encircling the metropolis, crossing the Thames at some point west of Vauxhall-bridge, and not coming within the limits of our inquiry on the north side of the river.

Canning.
Dalmousie.
John Johnson, Mayor.
J. C. Herries.
J. M. F. Smith.

* These are the Edgeware-road, from Oxford-street to the intersection of the New-road; the New-road and the City-road, to Finsbury-square; Bishopsgate-street; London-bridge; High-street, Borough; Blackman-street; the Borough-road; Lambeth-road; Vauxhall-road; Vauxhall-bridge, Vauxhall-bridge-road; Grosvenor-place, and Parklane.

RIVER WATER—RAIN WATER.

HOW TO SET THE THAMES ON FIRE!

Sir,—The perusal of Mr. Wylson's very useful and interesting article on water in last week's Builder, induces me to offer you one or two little suggestions and remarks.

Why is it "quite impossible" for water companies to keep river water stagnant for a sufficient time to allow of its perfect purification from extraneous matter?

As it is, these companies practise the method of subsidence in reservoirs, though not for a sufficient length of time. Would not *additional reservoirs* enable them to take *additional time*,—and that too to *any* requisite extent? And as to agitation of surface, could not these additional reservoirs be also roofed over, to prevent the action of wind or any other agitating causes on them?

Ought a great capital, at all events, like London, to be deprived of the luxury—nay the requisite—of a perfectly clear and pure soft water, merely on the ground of additional expense? Why, I find, in the pages of The Builder itself, that at this very moment, it is proposed to expend no less a sum than 2,000,000*l.*, in the obtainment, otherwise, of this very comfort, namely, an abundant supply of clear soft water for the metropolis.

Old and stale as the standard joke about setting fire to the Thames is, Mr. Editor,—though still held good enough for repetition, on account of its supposed outrageous absurdity;—what will your select and intelligent readers say to the fact,—attested gravely in the following quotation from one of the curious works of that rich and rare old "Empyric," Van Helmont—which has just been called to my recollection by some kindred remarks in Mr. Wylson's article—not only that the thing is perfectly possible, but that it has actually been done, and may yet be done, again and again, for all that I know!

"We find by experience," says he "that when the water of the Thames is carried to the East-Indies; when the ship in which it is, comes under the Equator, where the power of the sun is most intense, the water becomes thick, tough, and clammy; but as soon as it is brought again to these parts, it becomes thin again, *and takes fire like brandy!*"

Let us hear no more jokes then about setting fire to the Thames; it is clearly no joke, but a sober, honest fact, or possibility at least, even on the most approved principles of modern chemistry,—for nothing is at all events more likely, than that the animal or other organic matter contained in the Thames water may, by decomposition, in barrels or other close vessels, so impregnate the water with hydrogenous or other inflammable gases, as to render it apparently combustible.

By the way, and seriously too, Van Helmont's observations, and those of the old chemists in general, are not to be sneezed at, notwithstanding the odd way in which the old boys sometimes come out with them, as the following curious anticipation of the modern discovery of the volatile oil or spirit of ammonia, in clear rain-water seems very likely to shew.

"If we take clear rain-water," says Van, "and put it into a well-closed glass, and set it for a long time in the sun, or to digest in warm water, it will putrify and precipitate, *and the water when distilled, will yield an oyl!*"

I am, Sir, &c.,
High Holborn, 6th July, 1846. J. E. D.

WANT OF A PROPER BUILDING FOR THE RECORDS.

The necessity for the erection of a fitting building for the reception of our public documents, is becoming more and more obvious. The risk to which they have long been exposed, and are now, is a disgrace to those in power, and *in the event of a conflagration*, would draw upon them no small amount of popular indignation.

The "Seventh Report of the Deputy Keeper of the Public Records," recently published, again draws attention to the fact, that our records (invaluable historical documents) are in greater jeopardy than any ordinary merchant would expose his account-books to.

The proposed appropriation of the Victoria Tower, when built, served to drive off the consideration of the question for a time. The tower, however, it was found, would not be large enough for the purpose, and the roof of the whole building is now talked about as the intended record office. A more unsuitable place can scarcely be conceived: we trust the proposal will be abandoned, and a proper fire-proof repository for these most valuable monuments be speedily built.

INSTITUTION OF CIVIL ENGINEERS.

ARTESIAN WELLS.

June 30th, the president in the chair. A paper was read describing the effect of the deep wells of the metropolis on the supply of water in the London basin, by Mr. Frederick Braithwaite, member. The object of this paper was to direct attention to the fact that the numerous deep wells sunk in and near the metropolis were gradually draining the chalk basin, and that every additional well driven in search of water had the effect of diminishing the water level in all the wells already existing. As a proof of this fact, it was stated that in a well at Combe's brewery, sunk twenty years ago, the water rose at that time to within 70 feet of the surface, but that it now only rose to within 120 feet, shewing a diminution of 50 feet. From this and other instances it was argued that the supply of water was rapidly decreasing, and this was attributed as well to the improved under drainage of the lands which received the falling rain, as to the increased demand upon the springs. The deep springs, therefore, were shewn not to be inexhaustible, that obtaining water from them was attended with considerable expense and uncertainty; it was argued thence that it was necessary to consider very carefully any attempts for obtaining a considerable supply of water by means of wells, from the chalk of the London basin. A remarkable fact also shewn in one of the tables, was that on the 5th of April, 1832, there occurred a sudden depression of eighteen feet of the springs, which lasted for half an hour, at the end of which time thirteen feet of the eighteen were regained. The paper contained many interesting facts as to the general amount of the supply of water from the different strata, and was illustrated by a series of plans, the first of which was a map on a large scale, taking St. Paul's as the centre, describing around it a series of circles with a radius of four miles; the external circle was divided into the thirty-two points of the compass, from which lines were drawn to the centre (St. Paul's). Upon these lines a series of sections were laid down, exhibiting the various strata down to the chalk, as shewn by the deep wells sunk in the districts between those lines, as far as the information could be gathered from those employed in sinking and boring them. These sections exhibited a remarkable contour of the chalk basin, and furnished fertile subject for speculative geology, as well as very valuable information as to

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